

Inventory and Monitoring Program



The San Francisco Bay Area Network Inventory and Monitoring Program tracks the status and trends of the region's natural resources in order to improve park management through greater reliance on scientific knowledge.

Raptor Monitoring at Pinnacles National Monument: Update 3/12/07

PLEASE NOTE: Any raptor nest location details should be considered sensitive data, and should NOT be shared with visitors. Prairie falcons (PRFAs) and the Hawkins peregrine falcon (PEFA) pair have settled into chosen nest sites for the season, and are actively incubating eggs. At present there are 11 territories with PRFA pairs and the PEFA territory. These are listed below:

Goat Rock / Resurrection Wall: PRFA nest, incubating eggs
Teapot Dome / Egg: PRFA nest, incubating eggs
Hawkins Peak : PEFA nest, incubating eggs
Crowley Towers : PRFA nest, incubating eggs
Pig Canyon : PRFA nest, incubating eggs
North Chalone Peak : PRFA pair, nest likely
Willow Spring Slide: PRFA pair, nest likely
Little Pinnacles (Yaks): PRFA nest, incubating eggs
South Balconies: PRFA nest, incubating eggs
Machete / Citadel: PRFA nest, incubating eggs
D. Soto Canyon : PRFA pair, nest likely
Drywall Slide: PRFA nest, incubating eggs

The following territories are currently unoccupied, with no falcons observed within them:

Scout Peak
Pipsqueak Pinnacles
North Balconies
Prescribed Burn Cliffs
Frog / Hand
South Wilderness Rock

South Chalone Peak and Marion Canyon have not yet been checked for raptor territorial status. 3 PRFA nest sites - at Machete, Resurrection Wall, and South Balconies - are new sites that have not been previously documented. Of these, the most significant in relation to raptor advisories is the Machete nest. PRFA pairs have never been documented nesting on Machete before. Details on revised advisory areas will be forthcoming by mid-April. 3 territories - Frog/Hand, Scout Peak, and Pipsqueak Pinnacles - were occupied earlier in the season, but no PRFA have been documented within these territories since then. The peregrine falcon pair at Hawkins has also settled into a cliff cavity nest site and is incubating eggs, at a site used in previous years by PRFA.

Please note that climbing and hiking advisories are in effect, and will be updated by mid-April. Raptor advisory signs have been placed at Hawkins, Scout, Balconies, Little Pinnacles, and on the path to Frog / Hand to protect these sensitive species from the pressures of hiking and climbing during the nesting season. A group of hikers was observed in the Scout Peak advisory area in mid-March, and was escorted from the area by Brant Porter and Scott Scherbinski. Any additional assistance park staff can provide in diverting visitors from advisory areas, and reporting incidents of climbers and hikers in advisory areas to law enforcement staff, is highly appreciated!

Golden eagles have also been seen regularly in and near the park over the past three weeks. The golden eagle nest on the west side of North Chalone Peak is being incubated by the adult pair. The golden eagle nest at the Eucalyptus Grove near the west side entrance to the park has at least 2 nestlings in the site, both approximately 2 weeks old. A golden eagle pair has also been seen in circling near McCabe Canyon, and an additional golden eagle pair has been observed circling near the condor facility ridge on several occasions.

Red-tailed hawks (RTHA) have been observed throughout the park, with pairs finishing stick nest construction and beginning to incubate eggs. RTHA pairs incubating eggs in nests have been confirmed in the Kingman Land North and South Wilderness North territories, with nests likely to be used soon for egg incubation in the Eagle Rock, Western Front, Upper Condor Gulch, Hand, and North Wilderness Trail territories.

Red-shouldered hawk (RSHA) pairs are preparing nests for egg incubation in the following territories: Kingman Land North, Regan Ranch, McCabe Canyon, the Bench Area, and the South Wilderness. A territorial RSHA pair in the Pinnacles Campground has already started egg incubation at a previously undocumented site.

Of note, 2 great-horned owl nests have been confirmed so far this year, at the Pinnacles Campground and Kingman Land North areas. The latter site is previously undocumented. Adult pairs are currently incubating eggs at both sites. Great-horned owl nests have not often been documented in the park, but these raptors tend to nest early, partly due to their large size and long periods of egg incubation and nestling rearing.

Other raptors observed in the park in March include American kestrels, and the increasing presence of turkey vultures above the High Peaks. White-tailed kites have returned to occupy territories in McCabe Canyon, the Kingman Land South area, and likely in the South Wilderness, on the west side near Jawbone Canyon, and along the pig fence near Double Gates. Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks are active throughout the park along riparian corridors, and have been observed in the Kingman Land North, along the North and South Wilderness Trails, in Lower Condor Gulch, and on the west side near Chaparral Ranger Station, South Balconies, Balconies Cave, and Juniper Canyon. Great-horned owl vocalizations have been documented in upper Condor Gulch, at the base of Pipsqueak Pinnacles, and near the Reservoir. Long-eared owls have been heard again in the Chalone Housing to Trails Building area, hooting in the live oak overstory. Although 2 owls were heard briefly in mid-March, only 1 long-eared owl has been confirmed recently in the housing area, possibly suggesting that there is not yet a mating pair in the area.

Western screech-owls have also been heard vocalizing near the Bear Gulch Visitor Center and along the Condor Gulch Road, and in the Pinnacles Campground. Ospreys have also been seen circling over the central High Peaks on several occasions.

Thank you to all the staff who have continued to provide me with raptor observations; every detail on raptor behavior helps to provide a more complete picture of raptor breeding at the park. If anyone on staff wishes to report raptor observations, I would greatly appreciate it if you please fill out a wildlife observation card, and deposit it in my box in the RRM Office. In particular, I wanted to thank Linda Regan, Brian Hess, Scott Scherbinski, Paul Johnson, Sharon Franklet, and Alacia Welch for raptor observations. I appreciate the support!